

Remarks in Huntington, West Virginia September 10, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thank you all very much for coming. By the sound of things, it sounds like the Herd is thundering. It's good to be back here in Huntington. Thank you all for the hospitality. You know, this isn't my first time here. I've liked it every time I've come because the people are down to earth, hardworking, decent, and they love America just like I do.

I want to thank our friends from Ohio who have joined us today. I appreciate you coming. I want to thank our friends from Kentucky who are here today. And of course, I want to thank my friends from West Virginia who are here. Thank you all for coming.

I told Zell we're going to have a heck of a day. He's helping to kick it off in fine fashion. You know, Zell Miller, he represents a lot of folks out there who are wondering whether or not it's okay to vote Republican. He's what I would call a discerning Democrat. More importantly, he is a proud American, and I'm proud to call Zell Miller friend.

I'm here to ask for the vote. I'm here to let you know that I'm willing to get amongst the people and say, "I need your vote, and I need your help to win this election." You see, we have a duty in this country to vote, and I would hope you would go out and register your friends and neighbors. Remind them we have a duty. Register our fellow Republicans; register independents; register discerning Democrats. Then after you register them, get them headed to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, remind them, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, put Dick Cheney and me back in there for 4 more years.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all. Zell said—we got on the bus after flying up from Washington, and he said, "I wish you'd have brought Laura." He's got really good judgment. *[Laughter]* You know, when I asked Laura to marry me, she said, "Fine, I'll be—I'm willing to marry you, just so long as I never have to give a political speech." *[Laughter]* She was a public school librarian who didn't particularly care about politics or politicians. I said, "That's fine, you'll never have to give a speech." And we got married. Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise. *[Laughter]* She is a—the country saw, in New York City, she not only gives a good speech, but she's gracious and strong. She's comforting. I love her dearly. Perhaps the most important reason of all in putting me back in office is so that Laura will have 4 more years as your First Lady.

I appreciate Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito from the great State of West Virginia joining us today. Shelley Moore is a fine, fine Member of the United States Congress. She's a class act. I also appreciate today traveling with Senator Mike DeWine from the State of Ohio. I appreciate you coming, Mike. He too is a fine United States Senator, and I'm proud his son Patrick is joining us today as well.

I want to thank all the State and local officials here. I want to thank all the candidates for throwing your hat in the ring. I appreciate the Wil Gravatt Band. I want to thank the Parkersburg Base Army Reserve Charlie Company, the 463d Engineering Battalion. Thank you all for coming.

Most of all, thank you all for taking Friday out of your life to come. I appreciate you being here—for taking this Friday to come here. I appreciate it. It means a lot to me. I know it means a lot to Zell. See, I'm looking forward to this campaign. I'm

going to tell the people where I stand and what I believe and where I'll lead this country.

I believe every child can learn and expect every school to teach. I went to Washington to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. I believe we ought to raise standards. I believe we ought to measure early to solve problems before it's too late. I believe we got to stop this practice of just shuffling kids through our schools year after year, grade after grade without learning the basics. I believe we've got to trust the local people to make the right decisions for their schools. I know we're closing the achievement gap in America, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our seniors with good health care. Medicare is an incredibly important program for our seniors, but it wasn't modernizing. People say, "What do you mean when you say that?" Well, Medicare would pay thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars for heart surgery, but it would not pay for the prescription drugs to prevent the heart surgery from being needed. That didn't make any sense for our seniors. It didn't make any sense for our taxpayers. I went to Washington, DC, to solve problems. We have now modernized Medicare to help our seniors. Beginning in 2006, seniors will get prescription drug coverage, and we're not turning back.

I believe in the energy, innovation, and spirit of America's workers, small-business owners, farmers, and ranchers. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation.

When you're out rounding up the vote, remind people about what this economy has been through. Five months before we got into office, the stock market had started to decline. We had a recession right as we got there. There was corporate scandals. By the way, we made it clear we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. We had a terrorist attack

on our country. All those were obstacles for our American workers.

See, we're overcoming these obstacles. We're overcoming these obstacles because we got great workers, great farmers. We're overcoming it because the entrepreneurial spirit is strong. We're overcoming it because of well-timed tax relief.

Our economy is growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. We've added about 1.7 million new jobs in the past year. We've added 107,000 manufacturing jobs since January. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent. That's lower than the average rate of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. The unemployment rate in West Virginia is 5.2 percent. The economic stimulus plan we passed is working.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty and weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This isn't going to happen on my watch. I'm running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership, and that is why, with your help, we will carry West Virginia again; we'll carry Ohio again; we'll carry Kentucky again; and we'll win in November.

Listen, I understand the world we're living in is changing. The generation of our dads and granddads, a person generally had one job, one career, worked for one company that provided health care and a pension. Today, it's different. The workforce has changed. Most of those workers in the past were men. Today, many, many workers are women. They're working inside the home and outside the home. Many people change jobs and careers several times over the course of a lifetime. Yet many of the fundamental systems, the Tax Code, health coverage, pension plans, worker training,

were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. And so, for the next 4 years, we'll transform the systems to help our citizens. We'll transform these systems so all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to make your own choices so you can realize the great promise of America.

Any hopeful society has a growing economy, and I have a plan to keep this economy moving forward. To create more jobs in America, America must be the best place in the world to do business. That means we've got to reduce the regulations on our businesses, particularly small businesses. It means we got to stop these junk lawsuits that are threatening employers all across the country.

It means Congress needs to get my energy policy to my desk. Yes, in order to create jobs here in America, we need sound energy policy. That means more conservation; that means supporting renewables; and that means using coal, clean coal technology to make sure people can find work. The plan I submitted will modernize the electricity grid so hospitals and offices can keep focus on hiring workers, not coping with blackouts. What I'm telling you is, we need an energy policy that makes us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Listen, to create jobs, we've got to reject economic isolationism and open up markets for U.S. products. See, we open up our markets for foreign goods, and that's good for you. It's good for you because the more products you can choose from, you're likely to get the product you want at higher quality and better price. That's how the market works. So what I'm telling places like China is, "You treat us the way we treat you." See, the best policy is to level the playing field, because Americans can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere so long as the rules are fair.

To make sure jobs are here in America, to make sure people can find work, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low. Taxes are

an issue in this campaign. See, I'm running against a fellow, he's already promised over \$2 trillion of new money, new Federal programs, so far.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. We've got—there's going to be a lot of temptations coming down the pike to tell everybody everywhere what they want to hear. That means—that generally means spending your money. But the problem is, he hasn't told us how he's going to spend—pay for it. See, he said, "Oh, don't worry. We'll pay for it by taxing the rich." Two things wrong with that. One is, you can't raise enough money by taxing the rich to pay for \$2 trillion worth of new programs. See, there's a gap between his promise and what he can deliver, and guess who's going to get stuck with the bill? Secondly, you've heard that rhetoric before, haven't you? "Oh, don't worry. We'll just tax the rich." Well, the rich hire accountants and lawyers, and you get stuck with the bill. We're not going to let him tax you. We're going to win a great victory in November.

And speaking about the Tax Code, we're going to do something about our Tax Code in a second term. We're going to make it easier to understand, and we're going to simplify it. This Tax Code of ours is too complicated. It is filled with special interest loopholes. Americans spend about 6 billion hours a year on taxes because of the complicated nature of the Tax Code. The Tax Code is a drag on our economy. In a new term, I'll bring Republicans and Democrats together to simplify the Federal Tax Code.

Listen, this world of ours is changing, and the nature of the jobs are changing. And we've got to help workers gain the skills necessary so they can fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's why I'm such a big believer in improving access to the community colleges all across our country. I remember coming to the community college here in Huntington, West Virginia. We talked about job training. We talked about

people having the skills necessary to fill the jobs which are being created.

And we got to do a better job in our high schools. Do you realize that about—most of the new jobs, over 50 percent of the new jobs require at least 2 years of college? And yet, one in four of our students gets there. That's why we've got to fund early intervention programs in high schools to help students who are at risk. We want to place a new focus on math and science in our high schools. We want to require a rigorous exam—over time, require a rigorous exam before graduation. See, by raising performance in high schools and by expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income families, we will help more Americans start their career with a college diploma.

We'll do more to make quality health care available and affordable. More than one-half of the uninsured are small-business employees and their families. Small businesses are having trouble affording health care. One way to help small businesses afford health care and, therefore, help families is to allow them to join together to purchase insurance at the discounts big companies get. We'll help more people own and manage their own health care plans. We'll expand health savings accounts. We'll ensure every poor county in America has a community or rural health center so people can get the primary care they need. And we're going to do something about these junk lawsuits that are running good docs out of practice and running up your costs.

One reason small businesses are having trouble affording health care is because these lawsuits are running up the cost of medicine. Make no mistake about it, junk lawsuits are running up your costs. And make no mistake about it, too many good docs are being run out of practice. And that's harmful. It's harmful for the folks in Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and all across America. You cannot be pro-doctor, pro-patient, pro-hospital and pro-trial-law-

yer at the same time. You have to choose. My opponent made his choice, and he put him on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I made my choice. I'm for medical liability reform—now. In all we do to improve health care in America, we will make sure that health decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

In a changing world, ownership brings stability to people's lives. One of the most hopeful statistics in recent times is the fact that homeownership rates are at an alltime high in America. More and more people are owning their home. In a new term, we'll continue to expand ownership all across this country. We want more and more people opening the door of the place where they live and say, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property."

And we want to make sure our younger workers have got a Social Security system that's viable. Now, let me say, if you're an older worker or you're a dependent now on Social Security, you're going to be just fine. If you're a baby boomer, you'll be just fine when it comes to Social Security as it's now structured. But I think we need to think about our children and our grandchildren when it comes to Social Security. It's one thing for people like Zell and me to say it's going to be fine for us; we have an obligation to see that it's fine for younger folks. And so, therefore, I think younger workers who are coming up ought to have the right to take some of their own tax money and put it in an account they can call their own, a personal savings account that will help them with Social Security.

In a world of change, some things don't change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In a time of change, we'll support the institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. We believe—we stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand

for marriage and family, which are the foundations of society. We stand for the Second Amendment, which gives every American the individual right to bear arms. And I stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing danger of terrorism. Since the terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we have fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening our intelligence services. We're staying on the offensive. We're striking the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will work—we will continue our work to advance freedom in the broader Middle East and around the world, and we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Four years ago—4 short years ago—Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was seriously pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; and Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks. Because we acted, the Government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorists; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

The progress involved careful diplomacy, clear moral purpose, and some tough decisions. The toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's record of aggression and support for terror. We knew he had a long history of pursuing and even using weapons

of mass destruction. And we know that after September the 11th, our country must think differently. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. I went to the United States Congress. Members of both Houses and both political parties looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered. They came to the same conclusion that my administration came to—Saddam Hussein was a threat—and they authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the very same intelligence I looked at, and he came to the same conclusion then that we had come to, that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He authorized—he voted to authorize the use of force.

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into harm's way, we must try all options in order to solve the threat. And that's why I went to the United Nations. I was hoping that diplomacy would work. The United Nations looked at the same intelligence we looked at. They remembered the same history we remembered, and they came to the conclusion that Saddam Hussein must disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. So the world spoke with a 15-to-nothing vote in the Security Council.

But Saddam Hussein wasn't interested in what the world had to say. He hadn't been interested over the past decade, and he certainly wasn't interested now. He ignored the demands of the free world. As a matter of fact, when the U.N. decided to send inspectors into the country, he systematically deceived them. In other words, he wasn't about to comply.

So I had a choice to make at this point in time: Do I take the word of a madman, forget the lessons of September the 11th, or take action to defend America? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. Because we acted to defend ourselves, 50 million people now live in freedom. Because we upheld doctrine, because the most solemn duty of government is to defend the security of the people of this country, 50 million people now in Afghanistan and Iraq are free. Think about Afghanistan for a minute. This is a country, not all that long ago, where young girls weren't allowed to go to school, and their mothers were taken into the public square and whipped if they didn't toe the line of the Taliban. The Taliban was backward and barbaric in their vision. They're the opposite of what we stand for in America. They didn't believe in religious freedom. They didn't believe in political freedom. They didn't believe in freedom. Today, over 10 million Afghan men and women—10 million citizens, over 40 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote for the upcoming Presidential election. It's amazing.

Freedom is powerful, isn't it? In Iraq, it's still tough there. But Iraq now has a strong Prime Minister, a National Council, and national elections will be held in January.

The world is changing. Our Nation is standing with the people of those countries, because when America gives its word, it must keep its word. We're standing with those people in the country—in those countries, and as we do so, we're serving a historic cause that will make our country safer and make the world more peaceful, something we all want. See, free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. A free Iraq and a free Afghanistan will serve as a powerful example for those who long for freedom in a part of the world that is desperate for freedom.

So our mission in Afghanistan and Iraq is clear. We'll help the new leaders. We'll help them head down the road to democracy. We'll help them hold elections. More importantly, we'll train Afghan and Iraqi

citizens for police and their armies so they can do the hard work of defending their countries, their fellow countrymen from the designs and demands of a few terrorists. We'll help them provide—we'll provide those countries with stability as quickly as we can get the job done. And then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

I'm proud of our military. We've got a great United States military. I've had the privilege of meeting with those who wear the Nation's uniform. I've met them all across bases here in America and around the world. I'm telling you, I've seen their unselfish courage, their great decency. I appreciate the veterans who are here today who have set such a great example for those who wear the uniform today. I appreciate the military families who are here today.

I made a commitment to those who wear the uniform and their families that they will have the resources they need to complete their missions. So I went to the Congress a year ago and proposed supplemental funding of \$87 billion. It's really important funding because it provided body armor, spare parts, ammunition, fuel, supplies needed by our troops who were in harm's way in Iraq and Afghanistan. I appreciate Senator Miller's strong support for that funding request. We received strong bipartisan support. The support was so strong that only 12 Members of the United States Senate voted against this important funding, 2 of whom were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. In fact, only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops. Two of those Senators were my opponent and his runningmate. They asked him to explain his vote. It was right here in Huntington, West Virginia, where he said, "I voted for the \$87 billion, right before I voted against it"—right here in Huntington. They kept pressing him after

that, and he said, well, he was proud of his vote. And finally he just said, "The whole thing was a complicated matter." [Laughter] There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

When it comes to Iraq, my opponent has more different positions than all his colleagues in the Senate combined. [Laughter] Senator Kerry once said, "It would be naive to the point of grave danger not to believe that, left to his own devices, Saddam Hussein will provoke, misjudge, or stumble into a future of more dangerous confrontation with the civilized world." End quote. In 2002, he voted for the war. But then he voted against body armor and combat pay for our troops. When the heat got on in the Democrat primary, he declared himself the antiwar candidate. Then several months later, he said he would have still voted to go to war, even knowing everything we know today. Earlier this week, he adopted the language of his one-time rival Howard Dean, saying it's the wrong war at the wrong time, even though he earlier said it was the right decision, and he supported it.

The newest wrinkle is that Senator Kerry has now decided we are spending too much money in Iraq, even though he criticized us earlier for not spending enough. One thing about Senator Kerry's position is clear: If he had his way, Saddam Hussein would still be in power and would still be a threat to the security and to the world.

During the next 4 years, we'll continue to work with our friends and allies to make us more secure and to make them more secure and to make the world more peaceful. We put together a broad coalition, about 40 nations in Afghanistan and some 30 in Iraq. But I'll assure you this: I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom. I've spent time with Prime Minister Koizumi. He's the Prime Minister of Japan. You know,

I was having dinner with him one evening, and it dawned on me how remarkable it is that an American President could be talking about working together to make the world a better place. After all, it wasn't all that long ago in the march of history that we were at war with Japan. They were our sworn enemy. My dad, I'm sure your dads and granddads, fought against the Japanese. And yet, right after World War II, after we were victorious, Harry Truman and other Americans never abandoned this notion that freedom could change societies, and they stood the line. There was a lot of skeptics in those days. I can understand why; we were just at war with them. You can imagine why a lot of American people said, "Why are we wasting our time? Why do we care?"

Well, people did care. See, they cared because they had a vision of the future. And because they worked to help Japan become a democracy, today, Japan is an ally. Prime Minister Koizumi and I sit around the table talking about the peace. We're talking about using our influence to make the world a better place, not only for the people in our own country but for people around the world. We talk about peace in North Korea. We talk about peace in Iraq. We talk about feeding the hungry.

Liberty can change countries from enemies to friends. Someday, an American President will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq, and they're going to be talking about the peace. They'll be talking about a better world. See, liberty has got the chance to make this world a more peaceful place. I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their liberty. I believe that if given the chance, they will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man. And I believe these things not because freedom is America's gift to the world, but because freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

This young century will be liberty's century. By promoting freedom here at home and freedom abroad, we'll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By reforming systems of Government, we will free more Americans to be able to realize their dreams. We'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of this country. We'll pass the enduring values of our country to a new generation. We will continue to lead the world to become more free and more peaceful.

You know, for all Americans, these years in our history will stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn't one of those times. This is a time when we need firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that make this a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. I met a fellow behind the stage here who was at Ground Zero the same day I was at Ground Zero. He was there to save lives. I was there to thank people for saving lives—so on September the 14th, 2001, that—both of us were in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It's a day I will never forget. I told him that. I said, "It's a day that

I'll never forget." There were workers in hardhats yelling at me at the top of their lungs, "Whatever it takes." I tried to do my best to comfort those who had been in the rubble. A fellow looked me right in the eye and said, "Do not let me down." I wake up every morning—every morning—thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, when I traveled our great country asking for the vote, I made a pledge to my fellow Americans that if you gave me a chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, with your hard work, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:58 a.m. at the Tri-State Milton J. Ferguson Field. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; former Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks in Ironton, Ohio *September 10, 2004*

The President. Thank you all. I'm glad you all are here. Thanks for coming out. I want to introduce you—you know your Senator, Mike DeWine. This is my friend Senator Zell Miller from Georgia. One Republican, one Democrat, all united to making this country a better place for everybody.

Thank you all for coming out to say hello. We're here to ask for the vote in Ironton, Ohio, and I appreciate you giving me a chance.

We've got plans to make this world a safer place, a stronger place, and a better place for every American. I'm here to ask for your help. I'd like to—I'd like your support, I appreciate your prayers. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thanks for coming out to say hello. I appreciate you. Thank you all.

Thank you, Mayor. I appreciate you coming.